

MARKETING

## How to inoculate your business against an economic slowdown with high-leverage marketing

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*Marketing aids the uphill climb in a rough economy*

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"Things which are easy to do are also easy not to do."

Think about it. Most days, it is easy to get up 10 minutes earlier in the morning and have some quiet time, but it is also easy to hit the snooze button and stay in bed.

The early days of a coronavirus-driven economic slowdown are here and it is time to inoculate your business to protect healthy revenue and profit streams.

So, what if there were a few high-leverage marketing initiatives that also fell into the "easy to do, but also easy not to do" category?

As the COVID-19 virus spreads and causes economic disruptions and unintended consequences in almost every industry, what marketing programs could you implement with little investment, short time-to-market, and an ability to generate additional revenue?

That is the definition of a highly leveraged marketing program, and here are 10 things you should consider:

Refresh the company Web site and value proposition. If your company still uses "We've been in business since 1945" on the Home and About Us pages, you are an ideal candidate for an update.

Believe it or not, no one cares about how long you have been in business. When you state your experience this way, the year your business was founded does not articulate a benefit or meet a buying attribute.

Prospects want to know what you can do for them now.

In fact, to many customers, a long tenure can actually convey negative connotations perhaps you are likely a low-tech business that does not keep up with the times.

An audit of your Web site and value proposition can cost less than \$10,000 and can pump new life into your business.

If you rewrote the statement "We've been in business since 1945" into "We have consistently innovated for 75 years and that's how we deliver value to you," you have turned your longevity into a statement of value.

Review your commitment to trade shows and industry conferences. As trade shows get cancelled due to lack of attendance and virus threats, it is a good time to review the performance of shows you have recently attended.

Many businesses have only a vague idea of how well their investment in shows and conferences pays back.

Consider implementing metrics like these to prune your show schedule and re-purpose spending on trade shows to higher value marketing programs:

- Number of show attendees
- Actual number of face-to-face interactions
- Percentage of interactions
- Number of qualified leads generated
- Number of leads closed
- Percentage conversion
- Total sales generated
- Total show attendance costs
- \$\$ Show value
- Booth space costs
- Sales per square foot
- Cost per lead

Shift longer-term marketing spend to shorter-term. Spending on marketing programs such as trade shows, conferences, brand support and advertising can have a long lead-time to implementation and longer time to payback.

Consider shifting your spend to efforts that have a short time-to-implement and short payback.

Search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click (PPC) programs can be implemented and tested in weeks and can have an almost immediate payback.

As variable expenses, you can test and control spending as you learn what works best.

Complete a marketing assessment and sales pipeline audit. If you have not done a rigorous review of the performance of your marketing and sales pipeline, it's time. The goals are threefold:

1. Provide an immediate identification of "Horizon 0" opportunities that can be evaluated for immediate performance and financial improvement.
2. Set a formal baseline of current performance that will function as a foundation for future performance improvements.
3. Ensure that marketing and sales performance align to deliver the right amount of "ideal customers" to your business. Marketing assessments and pipeline audits can be completed for under \$20,000. You may find these free resources useful to you:
  1. <https://contact.chiefoutsiders.com/improving-lead-gen-ebook>
  2. <https://www.chiefoutsiders.com/blog/finding-grand-slam-clients>
  3. Companion podcast: <https://thepracticalcmo.com/>

Act now to better understand your current market and customer portfolio. A slowdown should force you to take a deeper look at your current business.

Often, market, customer and competitor insights are not strengths of many businesses. They may have been in markets for a long time, but lack actionable knowledge about their share, profitability across multiple markets, and profitability across customers and competitor knowledge.

Improve your business intelligence now to re-shape your focus and prioritize and to prune unprofitable markets and customers.

If you are not reviewing all customers and firing unprofitable customers on a regular basis, you are missing the opportunity to have an immediate productivity sales and servicing impact.

Develop your current customer portfolio. It takes much less time to develop an existing relationship than it does to acquire new customers, and it is most cost-effective since you have also invested to acquire these relationships.

Create an initiative around this: "Retain every (good) customer and make the good ones into great ones." Design and implement programs to expand your current relationships.

Get rid of "lame" marketing practices. If you have ever used the headline "The Best Just Got Better" in your marketing messaging, you are guilty of lame marketing.

If your pricing strategy is built on "Good, Better, Best Pricing," you are guilty of lame marketing.

Challenge your team to up their game. Work to improve both your creative presentation and your marketing effectiveness.

Improve your competitive intelligence and win/loss performance. Many businesses see the world as just "Us and Prospects" and lack the detailed competitive analysis needed to improve their win/loss ratios. They go to market without the full picture of customer buying options and then do not understand why they either win or lose deals.

It is neither expensive nor time-consuming to send your troops on a scouting mission where they collect competitive intelligence. This opportunity is a great example of "easy to do, easy not to do."

Start by analyzing the last three months of deals. How many did you win, how many did you lose, and why? Then take action to improve these conversions.

Develop specific messaging to highlight differences with competitors to make your sales team more effective.

Prune your product portfolio. When times are tough, only your highest value and differentiated products are going to sell.

Tough times can help you understand which of your products are the most competitive and which offer the best value.

Use this as a starting point to evaluate your product portfolio with an eye to investing in your best products and retiring your poorest performing products. How do you sort out a best performer from a poor performer?

It is not just about revenue and margin, although you need to know that. Think about these criteria, too:

- n Financial product evaluation criteria
- n Strategic product evaluation criteria
- n Three past years' revenue, margin and trends
- n How well does it help acquire new customers?
- n Current percentage of your revenue mix
- n How well does it help develop customers?
- n How well does it help develop customers?
- n Current percentage of your sales forecasts
- n What is customer satisfaction with this product?
- n Costs to continually develop product
- n What is customer loyalty to this product?
- n Costs to maintain product
- n How competitive is this product?
- n Scorecard: Combine financial and strategic factors
- n How critical is this product to your future?

Protect your intellectual property assets. Now is not the time to lose either your talent or your intellectual property. Eventually, COVID-19 will be under control, and you want to come out of this economic slowdown in healthier shape than before.

Protecting your intellectual property is also one of those "easy to do, easy not to do" items.

Consider trademark protection for your brand, taglines and product and service names. It is not time-consuming or expensive to do this.

Here is an excellent, low-cost trademark filing resource: <https://www.trademarkengine.com/>

Take a longer view and think about what makes your business truly unique and create a list of ideas for potential patents you could file on technologies you have created or business processes that you have implemented.

Patents create sustainable value in supporting your revenue and profits, and although they are more time-consuming and expensive to file than are trademarks, they also have the potential to create more long-term value.

What next?

It is important for businesses to have proactive plans to stay healthy in times of virus-driven economic downturns.

Find something on this 10-step checklist to try. Get your workforce back on business.



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